
Nobel prize winner Stanley Prusiner calls for Alzheimer's disease funding

Posted: November 12, 2010

Created: 12/11/2010 - 09:41

Nobel Prize winner Stanley Prusiner was one of the authors on a letter to the New York Times on October 27 advocating that congress pass legislation that "would raise the annual federal investment in Alzheimer's research to \$2 billion, and require that the president designate an official whose sole job would be to develop and execute a strategy against Alzheimer's."

Prusiner, who is director of the Institute for Neurodegenerative Diseases at UCSF, along with retired U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor and gerontologist/psychologist Ken Dychtwald, wrote:

“ As things stand today, for each penny the National Institutes of Health spends on Alzheimer's research, we spend more than \$3.50 on caring for people with the condition. This explains why the financial cost of not conducting adequate research is so high. The United States spends \$172 billion a year to care for people with Alzheimer's. By 2020 the cumulative price tag, in current dollars, will be \$2 trillion, and by 2050, \$20 trillion.

If we could simply postpone the onset of Alzheimer's disease by five years, a large share of nursing home beds in the United States would empty. And if we could eliminate it, as Jonas Salk wiped out polio with his vaccine, we would greatly expand the potential of all Americans to live long, healthy and productive lives - and save trillions of dollars doing it.

Their letter came days after CIRM board member Leeza Gibbons joined California's First Lady Maria Shriver in her first March on Alzheimer's at the California Women's Conference. Gibbons founded Leeza's Place to provide support for caregivers of people with Alzheimer's disease and other disorders. The march raised a quarter of a million dollars for Alzheimer's research.

During Alzheimer's disease awareness month here are some numbers to keep in mind, from the NYT letter:

“ Starting on Jan. 1, our 79-million-strong baby boom generation will be turning 65 at the rate of one every eight seconds. That means more than 10,000 people per day, or more than four million per year, for the next 19 years facing an increased risk of Alzheimer's. Although the symptoms of this disease and other forms of dementia seldom appear before middle age, the likelihood of their appearance doubles every five years after age 65. Among people over 85 (the fastest-growing segment of the American population), dementia afflicts one in two. It is estimated that 13.5 million Americans will be stricken with Alzheimer's by 2050 - up from five million today.

CIRM has a Alzheimer's disease fact sheet about stem cell therapies for Alzheimer's disease, and a list of all awards addressing Alzheimer's disease funded by CIRM. One of those grantees, Frank LaFerla, is in this video about a discovery he made as part of the CIRM-funded research.

A.A.

Tags: Alzheimer's, University of California San Francisco

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